

# **NEWS RELEASE**



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Coeur d'Alene Tribe

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## **Coeur d'Alene Basin Natural Resource Trustees Complete First Mining-Related Interim Restoration Plan**

The Coeur d'Alene Basin Natural Resource Trustees (Trustees), a partnership between the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management], U.S. Department of Agriculture (Forest Service), and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, announced today the release of the Coeur d'Alene Basin Final Interim Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment (FIRP/EA), and the Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

The Trustees initiated a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and the Clean Water Act in 1991 to assess damages to natural resources resulting from exposure to mining-related metals. The results of this assessment confirmed widespread distribution of mining-related contamination throughout the Coeur d'Alene Basin (Basin) and described the resulting natural resource injuries and loss of ecosystem services.

As late as the 1880s, the Basin was rich with fish and wildlife. The basin also had abundant evergreen forests, cottonwoods and silver beeches and was home to deer, beaver, muskrat, otter, wolves, mountain lion, badgers, wolverines, moose, bear, numerous bird species and schools of trout. During the next 120 years those conditions changed.

Discovery of gold in the Coeur d'Alene River's North Fork in 1883 attracted thousands of prospectors and their families. While the gold rush was short-lived, the upper basin became the largest historic silver, lead and zinc mining district in the world, ultimately producing 7 million metric tons of lead, 30,000 metric tons of silver and 3 million metric tons of zinc. Impacts soon followed: mining wastes, including arsenic, cadmium, lead and zinc, were discharged directly into the river and its tributaries or were deposited on land, migrating into ground and surface water. The Coeur d'Alene River carried these contaminants west into Coeur d'Alene Lake and into adjacent wetlands, and occasional river flooding deposited contaminated sediment throughout the 19,200 acre lower Basin floodplain. More than 100 million tons of soil and sediment were impacted by mining and milling operations. Remaining waste rock, tailings, mine

drainage, and contaminated floodplain sediments continue to supply the ecosystem with extremely elevated metals contamination.

In 2003, the U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho ruled in Coeur d'Alene Tribe v. ASARCO, et al., that natural resources have been injured by hazardous substances released from mining and mineral processing facilities in the Basin. The injured natural resources include for example, surface and ground water, soils and sediments, riparian resources, fish, and tundra swans.

As provided by CERCLA, the Trustees developed the interim restoration plan to propose restoration alternatives which would partially compensate the public for damages to natural resources and loss of ecosystem services. Following consideration of public comments on a draft of the plan, the Trustees, in coordination with the State of Idaho, reached agreement on the selection of the preferred alternative.

The projects outlined in the final interim plan will restore, replace and/or acquire the equivalent of resources injured and ecosystem services lost due to mining activities in the Coeur d'Alene Basin. However, the projects are not intended to quantify or analyze the full extent of restoration needed in the Basin, nor to fully repair mining-related damages.

The preferred alternative includes a limited number of restoration projects in river, riparian, and wetland systems within the Basin to be accomplished over the next several years. At this time, the Trustees have approximately \$5 million available from previous settlements to complete restoration projects. These projects include restoration work in Moon Creek, Sherlock Creek, Pine Creek, Alder Creek, Benewah Creek, Hepton Lake, and targeted wetland restoration. The Trustees will implement restoration activities in coordination with Superfund cleanup activities being performed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the State of Idaho.

The Coeur d'Alene Basin FIRP/EA and FONSI can be viewed and downloaded on the web site of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/envicon/nrda/restoration.html>, or <http://www.fws.gov/easternwashington/NRDA.html>.

Links to the Coeur d'Alene Basin FIRP/EA and FONSI will also be posted on the internet sites of the U.S. Forest Service at <http://www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/projects.html>; the Bureau of Land Management at <http://www.id.blm.gov/>; and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe at [http://www.cdatribe-nnsn.gov/lake/p\\_damage.shtml](http://www.cdatribe-nnsn.gov/lake/p_damage.shtml).

Questions or requests for additional information may be made to:

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